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The Old Plum Grove Colony in Jefferson County 1854 - 1855

William John Meredith

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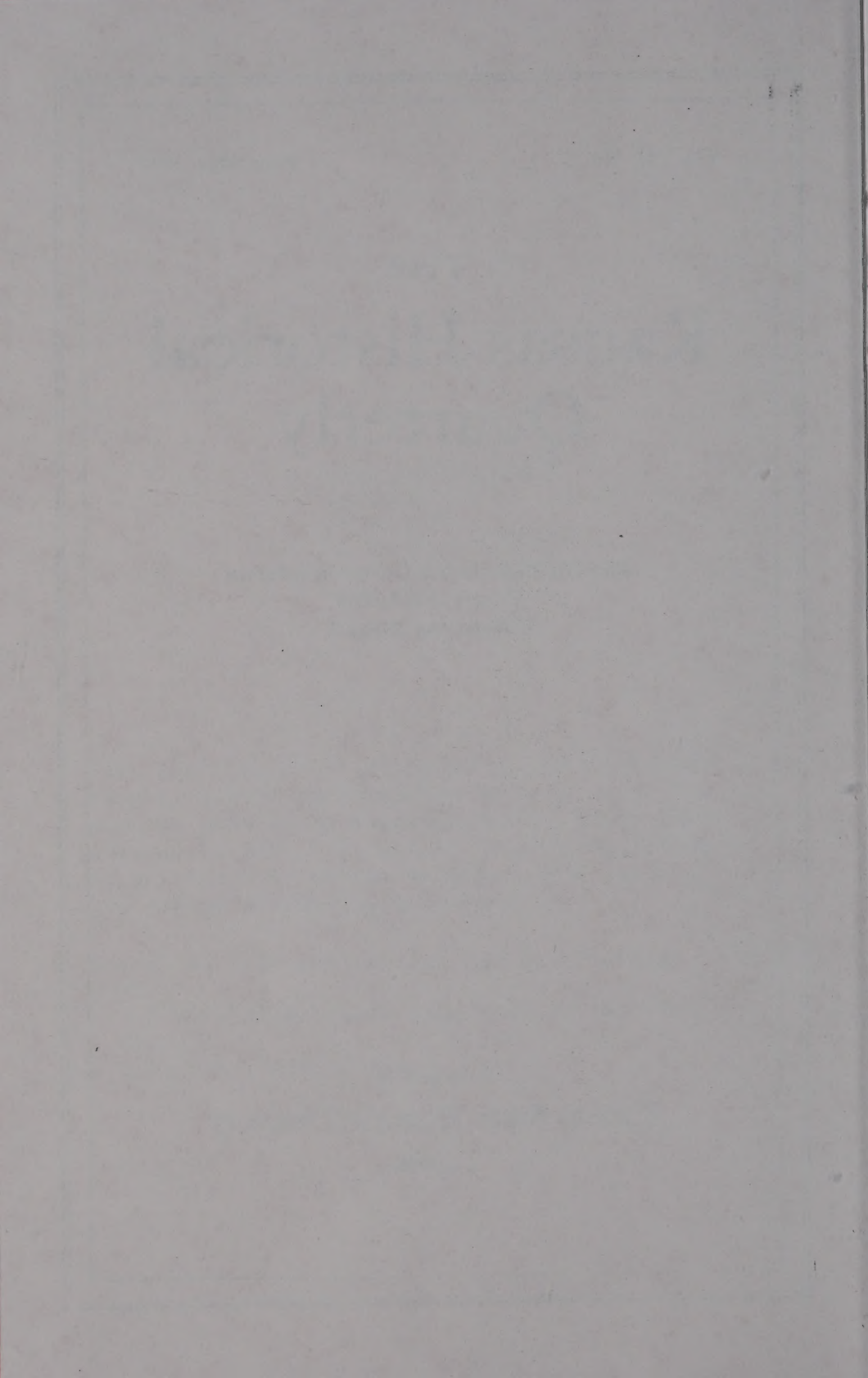
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County, 1854-1855
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The Old Plum Grove Colony

In Jefferson County, 1854-1855

WILLIAM JOHN MEREDITH*

WHEN the Douglas bill, in May, 1854, set off from the Indian country the new territory of Kansas, it "changed the whole political climate of America." How that change of climate affected the lives of a certain typical group of good Americans in the settlement of Kansas is the thesis of this research. For ten years at every session of congress, Douglas had entered protest against the policy of dumping dispossessed tribes over the western boundary of Iowa and Missouri. Two new commonwealths on the Pacific coast had been admitted into the union, separated from the other states by a thousand miles of mountain, desert and hostile savages, a barrier to migration and communication more difficult and dangerous than an Atlantic ocean. Benton, with his eye ever on empire, was busy with the project of a transcontinental railroad that would link the new Pacific theater of empire with the rest of the union through his city of St. Louis. The natural path of that artery of commerce and communication was up the valleys of the Missouri and the Kansas to some low pass through the Rocky Mountains. It would open up to settlement, as naturally, the habitable lands through which it passed. And every man in the Mississippi valley knew that for two hundred miles at least beyond the arbitrary boundary of Missouri and Iowa lay a land as fair as the sun shone on, the land of the flowery prairies. Except that selfish politics had so decreed, no Western man could understand why that arbitrary barrier should dam the westward flowing stream of settlement. And every man Jack west of the Mississippi believed that he should live to see that dam crumble before the resistless tide of migration.

A dozen or so miles north of what is now Kansas City a small community of old friends and neighbors had been waiting, so to speak, for the crumbling of the barrier. They were Southern folk, small-farmer type, from Virginia, east Tennessee and Kentucky, who, to escape the ruinous competition of the plantation system, had journeyed by way of the Wabash valley "as far west as any

* NOTE.—William John Meredith, oldest surviving descendant of the Plum Grove pioneer families, lived to the age of twenty-six in the Plum Grove community. Mr. Meredith reports the sources of information for this article include standard works on Kansas history, family records, official documents, personal papers, old letters, diaries and correspondence with other descendants.—Ed.

man could then get an acre from the public domain." When they arrived, about the middle 1830's, the county line was also the western boundary of Missouri, a meridian from Arkansas through the mouth of the Kaw to Iowa—still a part of Wisconsin territory. Their community center was Faubion chapel, Barry P. O., eight miles west of Liberty and at the edge of the Sauk and Fox Indian reservation. By the time their first small stumpy fields were fairly under cultivation, the federal government had removed their Indian neighbors, by the "Platte Purchase," and added six new counties to complete the state boundary as at present. That, by the way, was a plain violation of the so-called Missouri compromise, nobody objecting, since there was no political advantage to be gained by opposing it.

The Clay county neighbors at Faubion chapel had for years been well content with their small holdings, their moderate prosperity, their neighborhood school, church privileges and other community activities. They were comfortably housed; with dooryard flowers, vegetable gardens, orchards, well-tilled fields and open range for their livestock, they had the essentials of a good life. But as time went on they began to feel crowded. The influx of newcomers attracted by the opening of the "Platte Purchase" was gradually hemming them in. Piece by piece they saw their free pasture lands absorbed into the larger holdings of well-to-do recent arrivals. The westward urge in their blood began to revive. But the salability of their homes had diminished ever since the settlement of the six new counties. Nevertheless a few had sold out for what they could get to join the drift to the Oregon country, "where a man could get a half-section donation claim, of the finest land in the world" to help hold the far Northwest against the Hudson's Bay Company and the British encroachments. Later, after the Mexican war, a good many of their younger men had been drawn into the current of the California gold rush. The older folk, with large and increasing families of growing children, and especially the mothers, were loath to leave their pleasant homes for the dreadful California trail, already marked by the wreck of wagon trains, the graves of victims who had fallen by disease, starvation and redskin attack. Therefore, to them the formation of a new territory just across the river seemed like the answer to a prayer. Only two or three days journey by ox-wagon, with their household gear and livestock, would bring them, without hardship, to a new Promised Land and room enough for generations to come. Those flowery prairies, well known to them all by report of

Doniphan's riders, Santa Fé traders and buffalo hunters, would never attract or support a planter caste with hordes of black bond-servants, whatever the ranting politicians of the Atchison-String-fellow stripe might say. That would be a "poor man's country, a wheat, corn and livestock country, where a man could plow a straight furrow half a mile long and never hit a stump or a stone." There was plenty of timber for building and firewood along never-failing streams of living water, full of fish and the country was alive with wild game of every sort. Out there every man would be as good as his neighbor, with no aristocrat to cock an eyebrow to vex an honest farmer's independent spirit.

It was not that the neighbors at Faubion chapel lacked a decent pride of ancestry. All of them were of Pre-Revolution stock and could claim bloodkin with the best colonial families. Some of them might have traced their "pedigree" back to English gentry with coat of arms by royal grant from Tudor sovereigns, if they had cared for such vanities. The Declaration of Independence was their political bible. Of course all men are created equal under the law. To mention distinguished family connection was bad taste in the West—as if anybody needed more than personal worth to make him respected!

No, they didn't expect any trouble out there with the Emigrant Aid Yankees and such. And they didn't intend to have anything more to do with the blatherskite Proslavery politicians than they'd ever had at home. All that bragging of "carrying the battle from the halls of congress to the plains of Kansas," and all this whoop-te-do about "Southern Rights and driving out the nigger-lovin' Abolitionists," was nothing more than the fool talk they'd been reading in the papers and hearing on the stump at election time all their lives, raw-head and bloody bones, big noise soon over. So long as a man attended to his own business, he wasn't liable to get into a fuss. When a man took his wife and children to a new country he had enough to keep him out of mischief without picking a quarrel with anybody. Might as well talk about setting up Mormonism out there as making Kansas a slave state. Why, even now, lots of slaveholders were selling their plantations in Missouri and moving down to Texas. So many folks coming into northern Missouri from the free states that it wouldn't be ten years before they'd be able to carry any election, and then how long would it be till—well, "them that lived long enough would see what they'd see!"

Their crops were already in the ground when word finally came from Washington that the Douglas bill had passed both houses of

congress and had been signed by the President. All that summer the neighborhood was bustling with the new adventure of "moving over into Kansas." As soon as the corn was in the crib, a small party of fathers and their elder sons set out for the new Promised Land. The first day on the road saw them safely across the river at Weston. The next night they encamped at the head of the north fork of Slough creek, called Honey creek nowadays, about twenty-two miles west of Fort Leavenworth. They had followed the new Military road to the crossing of Stranger creek at Easton and so on to the prairie ridge, known to them afterward as the divide, west of Scatter creek. At Bill Smith point (of timber) they had turned off to the west to follow down the stream half a mile or so, going into camp a few rods from the present Plum Grove schoolhouse. "It was bitter cold that night, clear as a bell overhead, stars shining, but no moon. We built a big fire under a bank at the edge of the creek and while Dad and Uncle Jim got supper we boys gathered a big bed of dry leaves, spread our blankets and fixed the wagon sheet over us like a tent. Dad and I had the buffalo robe, too. Somebody was up at midnight to chunk up the fire and put on more logs, so we all made out to sleep pretty well till daylight." It had been a late fall and the "old folks" had predicted an open winter. It seemed much colder to the boys this side of the river than at home. All day they had bent their heads against the force of a cold, dry wind to which their homespun jackets and knitted mittens offered little resistance. Their lips were chapped, their cheeks felt as if they had been sandpapered. They had gone to sleep dog-tired, drained of their boyish excess of energy. They awoke unwillingly when their elders routed them out for breakfast. But when the sun came up over the divide and they had a good hot meal aboard they were eager for the next phase of their great adventure.

The stream was low, a succession of pools united by gravelly riffles where the shallow water spread and threaded among the rounded pebbles for a rod or so with a low gurgling sound. There was fish in the thin-iced pools, flat sunperch, scaleless blue and yellow "cats," wide-mouthed, with wicked looking horns on each side protecting the gills, and darting minnows in the shallows. The creek with many a bend and crumbling cut-bank, willow clump and overhanging trees, flows almost directly west from Bill Smith point for a mile or so before turning southwesterly to its junction with the main fork, and so on to the Grasshopper river and the Kansas. Every quarter mile or less it is joined by a spring branch bordered

with timber "points" like the fingers of a glove. Between the branches narrow tongues of prairie extend from the open ridges, north, east and south. The country to the west is more broken and looked then like the edge of a considerable forest. It is not recorded that the location for their intended settlement had been chosen on a former reconnaissance, but it must have been so for the party had come directly to the camping spot and the next morning the men scattered without discussion, each one to mark his building site and drive his claim stakes, each within shouting distance of his next neighbor, "just across the branch," or "twixt here and the crossing." Certain it is that by deliberate intention they had put the divide between them and older claims in what is now Leavenworth county. It is probable that they meant to get beyond the first wave of immigration of the summer before and away from the disturbances about the river towns. That they did not go on to the rich bottom lands along the Grasshopper may be explained by the intervening broken country or the malarial appearance of the flats and "sloughs" as seen from the ridges north of Osawkee, as the name of that place was then spelled. It is known that they intended to form a colony of friends and carry over the river with them as much of the spirit of the old neighborhood as they could, and the "head of Slough creek" answered to their requirements.

By mid-forenoon of their first day on the creek the sound of axes felling timber for cabins echoed up and down the miniature valley in which they had built their campfire. At noon when they gathered for their meal each man could report the number of logs he had cut, and before they slept they had "decided on whose cabin they'd begin at sunup next morning." Logs were snaked to place, butt ends swung clear of the ground under the hinder axle, or where the distance was short, the logchain was clevised to the doubletree directly. The boys managed the dragging, two of the older men notched the logs, the others laid them in place. White oak clapboards were rived from selected trees, native thin yellow limestone was hauled from an outcropping down the creek. In ten days from the time of their arrival six or eight rough log cabins stood with roofs on and stone chimneys built, all within a mile of the camp. Oak of several varieties, black walnut, elm, hickory, wild cherry, linden, cottonwood and other smaller species had been felled without regard "as to whose claim it stood on." The only tools employed were axe, frow, crosscut saw and wooden trowel. The timber was not

such grand trees as grew in the river bottoms, but it served the purpose, and only the smaller logs, ten to sixteen feet long were used.

There was no government survey as yet nor any title to be obtained except squatter rights to lands actually chosen and occupied. A claim jumper was an outlaw by common consent all over the territory, as he had been throughout the West. Lines and acreage could be adjusted after the surveyor had done his work.

Leaving three or four boys to finish the chinking and daubing, door hanging and floor-laying of split-log puncheons, the men of the party set out for home. It was a grand and glorious adventure to those sixteen-or-eighteen-year-old youngsters, playing "Dan'l Boone in wild Kaintuck." They closed the spaces between the logs with blocks of wood and clay; they laid and adzed puncheon floors and hung on wooden hinges stout battened doors. They heaped frozen earth well above the bottom log all around each hut to shut out the draught underfoot, they built pole bunks in the corners next the fireplace and filled them with dry oak leaves under blankets and thick "comforts" their mothers had quilted, sleeping two or three in a bed to keep warm at night; they hunted and trapped for fresh meat between times; ate prodigiously, "whooped and hollered from cabin to cabin like wild Injins, and kept a smoke in every chimney." They saw few faces but their own till the snow was off the ground in early March. Then when the wind and sun had firmed the ground for travel, here came the ox-wagons and the drove of livestock at sunset, up over the divide with the "rest of the folks."

The colony had arrived; William Meredith, born October 10, 1807, at Abingdon, Va.; his wife Nancy Faubion, born in 1817 on the French Broad river, east Tennessee, and their six children, four sons, two daughters, born in Clay county, Missouri, 1837 to 1849, occupied the cabin, nearest the divide, on the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ sec. 14/9/19.

Next to them "just across the branch," on the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ sec. 15, stood the cabin of James Henry Rickman, born 1828, and his wife Eliza Faubion, born 1832, and four children born in Missouri. Next to them lived John Faubion, born 1808, in east Tennessee (father of Eliza and second cousin of Nancy), and his second wife, Margaret, sister of Nancy; their young daughter, and a son and daughter by his first wife. Jacob Faubion and his brother Esekias, their wives and two or three children each, had claims in West $\frac{1}{2}$ sec. 22. They were brothers of Nancy. James Henry Clay Hopewell, born 1826, in Logan county, Kentucky, his wife, Mary Jane Horner, born 1831, and one daughter, Missouri born, claimed SW $\frac{1}{4}$ sec. 15. These lived south of the creek.

On the north side were John Jeffries, Jr., his wife Elizabeth and one daughter; John Horner, born 1828, brother-in-law of J. H. C. Hopewell, and his wife Marietta; Spencer Faubion, brother of Nancy, born 1822, and his wife Deborah; Robert M. Carter, born in Virginia, 1827, his wife Ellena, and two children. Thomas V. Carter, brother to R. M., his wife Susan and several children lived adjoining, but just over the later school-district line. These were the original colony, but with them came Napoleon Bonaparte Hopewell, born 1821, in Logan county, Kentucky (brother to J. H. C.), his wife Catherine Jane Johnson, born 1822, and four or five children, Missouri born, to settle a few miles to the south on the main fork of Slough creek, in sec. 34—always counted with the Plum Grove folks, especially in church matters. Other Clay county friends and relatives settled in groups on Walnut, Cedar and Crooked creeks, within easy visiting distance, and single families of their kin or old acquaintances located here and there round about. They all brought with them across the river in their covered ox-wagons, beside household gear and farming tools, seed grain and a supply of provisions to serve till more could be fetched from their old homes "t'other side of the river," after crop planting.

The little cabins were crowded at night, but the menfolk spent little daylight time indoors that first season. There were gardens to be cleared and planted in the brushland at the edge of the timber; sod to break, rails to split, fences to build and the livestock to watch on the open range. The tough sod of the immemorial grasslands defied the harrow to loosen soil enough to cover properly the seed of small grain. Corn was planted with pointed tools between the laps of the long black ribbons of overturned grass roots stretching the length of their first ten-acre fields. Vigorous work with heavy hoes kept the corn growing, but the yield the first year was light and inferior.

After seeding, sod-breaking went on all spring and early summer when a shower made it possible for three or four yoke of oxen to drag the heavy iron-shod wooden plow through the stubborn root-bound earth. The second year, when the inverted sod had been rotted by sun and wind and winter freezing, oats and wheat did fairly well and the corn yielded almost "as many bushels to the acre as the old timberland fields in Clay county used to do." The livestock thrived as never before on the good pasture of the prairie, after the first winter of scanty rations of wild hay and corn fodder.

The Southern folk from Missouri and Kentucky never suffered the

dreadful privations the Emigrant Aid folk underwent south of the Kaw. Reports of their starving and freezing in their wretched dug-outs and hay-thatched huts, living on doles of food and old clothing from the aid societies back East, excited a wondering pity among the Slough creek settlers. How could anybody be so shiftless in the real business of living as those poor Yankees around Lawrence and Topeka, who seemed to spend more time holding mass-meetings and listening to their stumpspeakers than in working their claims?

By the second winter all the Slough creek folks had housed themselves in neat hewn-log dwellings, relegating their first cabins to service as storerooms, weaving shelters, quarters for the boys and casual accommodations when visitors or travelers came, "folks from t'other side of the river," or prospectors for claims. Log stables and small barns; the beginnings of small orchards, usually on grubbed-out ground on a north-hill slope; stone-walled wells sunk to water veins in the underlying limestone; more house furniture, better farming tools, bought when they sold their fatted hogs and cattle in the fall and early winter; their slow oxen soon replaced with brisk-stepping horses and good mules, advertised to the surrounding country that "the Slough creek settlement was doing pretty well." There was little that the hard-working and temperate community lacked except the assurance of peace in the tumultuous state of conflict between the Free Staters and the "Lecompton gang" of Proslavery politicians. All around them there was fighting; night raids, personal feuds magnified into "border outrages," house-burnings, plundering, horse thieving, mobs and lynchings, each side damning the other for aggression and retaliation. The Slough creek settlers and "their kind of folks had no more use for the Lecompton gang" than they had for the revolutionary "Topeka state government cabal." Both parties seemed crazy and uncalled for in the face of the swift filling up of the territory by immigrants from the old states along the Ohio river and the northeast. Nine out of every ten newcomers were free labor men, seeking homes, first of all, "just everyday common folks, easy to get along with if they weren't stirred up by the good-for-nothing politicians." But with them came a plague of self-seeking adventurers, broken-down office holders, agitators, town loafers, border toughs, "young fellers a long way from home," quarrelsome idlers and fugitives from the law, newspaper correspondents dependent on the lurid tales they cooked up for their employment, local partisan papers supported by one party or the other for their appeal to hate and the love of excitement. A

lonesome squatter seeking for entertainment, "with a drink or two of rot-gut whisky in him would shoot off his mouth, get into an argument he knew nothing about, would find himself in a fight, maybe get mixed up in a killing, and God knows where it'd end." So ran the talk when the Slough creek settlers were "swapping work" or sitting in the shade after a good Sunday dinner. They believed that the "fuss would soon blow over and things would quiet down. Just wait until the actual settlers got a whack at that fool 'black code' the first territorial legislature had enacted." Might as well talk about establishing Mormonism in Kansas, they repeated, as to pretend slavery could ever be set up in the territory, by all the force and scheming and law-passing and newspaper agitation and so on that anybody'd a mind to put on it. And what'd that Yankee outfit down there around Lawrence and Topeka accomplished except to divide the free labor vote and keep up a guerrilla warfare that was ruining the country? Anybody with his eyes open could see that next time an election was held there'd be a landslide "that'd bury the 'Lecompton gang' so deep a coal miner couldn't find'm"—unless the Free Staters kept up their childish policy of "opposing and thwarting and fomenting trouble,"—"like a passel of spoiled brats not allowed to have their own way." "If everybody'd keep his shirt on and try to get along with his neighbors till the time came, and then vote the way he believed without respect to party politics, all this whoop and hooraw'd be over and forgotten in a year or so."

The first territorial legislature had set off counties, appointed the county courts (later called commissioners) and the necessary officers to set up local government. The Slough creek settlers found themselves just within the limits of what had been named Jefferson county whose seat of government was Osawkee on the Grasshopper river. Here in January, 1856, the county court met, consisting of N. B. Hopewell, O. B. Tebbs and Henry Owen. They divided the new county into three townships, all east of Range 18 being called Slough Creek; all west and south of Twp. 8 was named Osawkee; the remainder of the county was designated as Grasshopper Falls. A justice of the peace and a constable were appointed for each of the three new divisions; for Slough Creek township, William Meredith was named for justice and J. H. C. Hopewell, constable, their commissions dated, January 21, 1856. Their jurisdiction extended over the eastern half of the county, and from it later were formed Jefferson, Oskaloosa, Union, Rural, Sarcovie, and most of Norton townships as population increased.

This establishment of local government made little difference at first to the Clay county folks settled at the head of the stream which had given name to the new township, of which they were the geographical, and now the civil, center. They probably were pleased with the community's recognition as a definite unit by later comers roundabout, though they themselves had been less than a year in the territory. "Squire Meredith," so titled after the old custom of his native Virginia, made no claim to be the leading citizen. He would always be known among them as "Uncle Billy," an affectionate and respectful relationship accorded to all older men by their "kind of folks," that is, Southern people with the same customs and everyday speech. With the exception of the Hopewells, who had enjoyed a degree of academic training in Kentucky, he had rather more schooling than his neighbors. Years after he was spoken of by a cultured woman who had known him as "a fine scholar," though he made no pretensions to more than a practical education acquired by his own reading and contact with other well-informed people during his experience in pioneering in Western states. An aged gentleman who had known him well and long, wrote recently that "his word was as good as his bond, and his citizenship was marked by public spirit all too modest for his services." He had no political ambition, never ran for an office, accepted what public responsibility his neighbors accorded him in local concerns. His associate, J. H. C. Hopewell, had a clerical turn of mind and was generally given whatever secretarial duty came up in church and school organization. It is remembered that having had some Latin, he was much interested in the educational ambitions of the young people of the neighborhood, contending for the old-fashioned English pronunciation he had learned as a boy as against the new-fangled continental values coming into use among teachers from back East. He liked to quiz a youngster beginning an acquaintance with the language of Caesar and Cicero, ridiculing the "sissified" "Waynee, weedee, wekee" instead of the bold "Veenai, vaidai, vaisai," of the conqueror of Rome's enemies. The older men and women had grown up in pioneer communities before the public school had been vitalized by the generation of Horace Mann, McGuffey and the Northern mechanics and farmers demanding free education as compensation for the underprivileged workers' situation. Old documents disclose that a few of the Slough creek settlers had to sign with a cross. One grandmother lamented her inability to read the Sunday School leaflet a grandchild brought home to her in later years.

One circumstance which gave the settlement its standing among right-minded newcomers roundabout was the church-going habit of its people. In the old neighborhood "t'other side of the river" most of them had been members of one or another of the sects then prominent in the West: Baptists, Cumberland Presbyterians, "Campbellite" Christians, Methodists. All of them attended whenever a traveling preacher visited Slough creek, with little regard to his particular creed. In the lamentable separation of 1844, over the attempt to disqualify Bishop Andrew on account of his wife's inheritance of a few black servants, the Methodists in Missouri had been assigned to the Southern branch and they saw no reason for transferring to the Northern wing when they came to Kansas. Therefore when in their second year on Slough creek a local church society was formed, it was composed of members who brought their church letters from the old M. E. Church South of Faubion chapel, and their friends who joined for lack of church privileges in nearby neighborhoods. Among the names recorded as taking part in the organization are found: Napoleon B. Hopewell and his wife Jane C.; Margaret Faubion, wife of John; William Meredith and his wife Nancy; J. H. C. Hopewell and wife Mary Jane; and twenty-eight others. Of these are remembered, original members or early additions, Taylors, Rickmans, Staggs, Bundses, Carters, Shoemakers, Horners, Penningtons, Jeffries, Howards, Hulls, all families well known in the township. Many others attended usually and contributed for the sake of the respect they felt for the institution of public worship as making for order and sobriety in a lawless time. So it came to pass that when word was sent round that a visiting preacher would hold services at "early candle-lighting" the following Saturday evening at one or another of the settlers' houses, to be followed by preaching and a basket dinner on Sunday, "to which all are invited," parties of young folks on horseback or whole families in their farm wagons would come over the prairie ridges "to attend meetings with the folks on Slough creek."

It was at one of these basket dinners after preaching that it was suggested the community ought to have a proper meeting house, which would serve also for a school. The motion was made and carried with eager acclaim. Materials and labor were volunteered; money was contributed for windows, stove, hardware; and when the wild plum thickets near it were laden with ripe fruit, a neat hewn-log and native lumber building was dedicated as the Plumgrove school-and-meeting house. It served the community for a score of

years, a landmark better known over the country than even the two villages lately begun in the township.

Four or five miles to the north a townsite had been laid out on the Military road. Alvin Best of Winchester, Va., as oldest man in the enterprise, named it after his native town. A general store and post office had been established, slowly attracting the usual cluster of cabins and town dwellers.

A little farther away, south and west, near Newell's steam saw-mill, much patronized by early settlers, Dr. James Noble and several associates (among whom were N. B. Hopewell and William Meredith), formed a town company, had a site surveyed and named it Oskaloosa, after the Iowa town from which the doctor had come. From the first it had been designed for the permanent county seat. Osawkee had suffered somewhat from the rivalry of the town at Grasshopper Falls in the northwestern part of the county and from lack of good roads over the broken country to the east and south-east. Agitation led to the passage of a bill in the legislature authorizing an election for the relocation of a county seat in which Oskaloosa received more votes than any of her half a dozen rivals, but lacked a majority over all. In the final contest she won decisively through the active canvassing of the eastern and southern part of the county by William Meredith, A. G. Patrick, William Boland, Henry Owen and their assistants, 1858. The county records were moved to Oskaloosa and its name given to what was left of Slough Creek township after it had been reduced to form Jefferson, of which Winchester became the center of population.

About this time began the first attempts to improve the country roads. One had been ordered to connect Osawkee with Alexandria, Leavenworth county, with the expectation of its being extended to Wyandotte and Kansas City. William Meredith was appointed one of the viewers; it was laid out and surveyed, but it never was of much value to the county. The expense of the work was paid in county warrants, the beginning of a scandalous system by which petty paper-shavers long profited, the scrip being traded from hand to hand for what it would bring. In the hard times years later, a needy taxpayer could sometimes save a little by buying and turning in discounted scrip at the county treasurer's office for its face value. It was often charged that the "county seat ring" manipulated the finances so that "the insiders made a nice little profit on the shaving of jury fees, teachers' salaries, contractors' bills and such like public

expenses." To be sure delinquent taxes was always a good excuse for stamping warrants, "Not paid for lack of funds."

At the land sales of 1856, the Plum Grove settlers paid for their lands and got their patents from the government in December, 1858. After that they ceased to think of themselves as settlers, except as "old settlers" in contrast with the newcomers. The great Panic of 1857 affected them little for they did not handle much money in the course of the year. The price of grain made much less difference to them than it did to the people farther west in the wheat belt. They fed their crops to their livestock and marketed them "on the hoof." An occasional sale of grain as an accommodation, or a wagonload of prime oats to the quartermaster at Fort Leavenworth, they did not regard as a part of their farm policy.

The years before 1860 were moderately prosperous to the Plum Grove farmers. They lived comfortably on the fruits of their own toil on their own acres. They had brought with them across the river their own traditional domestic crafts. Every household manufactured its own ordinary clothing "from the sheep's back." Their gardens, poultry, milch cows; bread grains, ground at the grist mills on the Grasshopper river; their own home-cured meat and home-made sorghum molasses; dried and preserved fruit (wild and domestic); their cellared vegetables for winter, left them little to buy from the store. Fashion did not rule them oppressively in the matter of garments for public appearances. They dressed respectably when away from home and cleanly always when their outdoor work was done. Their women prided themselves on their spinning, weaving, dyeing, knitting and needlework. They produced their own butter, lard, soap. Cookery and housekeeping were the standards of wifely skill and performance. The men made their own tool handles, brooms, chair bottoms, repairs of machinery and harness, cobbled their own boots, dressed skins, shod their own horses, built whatever was needed for shelter or enclosure, were wise in the care and breeding of livestock. Some among them could always be counted on for minor surgery short of compound fractures and serious internal wounds. Nancy Meredith was a skillful midwife and numbered her successfully delivered "babies" by the score in the country roundabout. Nearly every family among her neighbors, near and far, included a namesake of hers. She thought nothing of setting out on her grey saddle pony in the midst of a storm at midnight to the help of a woman in childbirth. Doctors were few and far away and not to be called except in dire emergency. It used to

be said that a sick man in the community couldn't make up his mind to get well without the care and encouragement of Nancy's eldest son Jim, who "could sew up a gash as well as any surgeon, bully a discouraged convalescent out of his hypo, or pull an aching jaw-tooth when nobody else could do anything with the sufferer." Typhoid fever in summer and pneumonia in winter were their most dreaded ailments. Asiatic cholera, yellow fever, smallpox, they had known as dreadful visitations in the West before they came to Kansas, and few of them but had so lost a relative in days gone by. Vaccination had rid them of the fear of the smallpox scourge, they were now far enough from the great rivers and steamboats to lose their dread of "Yellow Jack," and "the cholery" of the Mormon migration and the California trails was seldom heard of nowadays, except at an army post out on the plains, that vague region "beyond the farming country."

The Great Drought of 1860 hit the Kansas farmers hard. "From the 19th of June, 1859, until November, 1860, over 16 months, not a shower fell to soak the earth. Vegetation perished all save the prairie grass." It was not quite so bad as that at Plum Grove. Early plowing and seeding and thorough cultivation, with a few light showers in late May and early June, prevented utter failure. The gardens produced quick-growing vegetables, small grain grew tall enough to be mown, though the seed was too light to pay for threshing. The corn, always king of their crops, did better. Without packing rains the soil remained loose and resistant to evaporation. Frequent stirring produced a "dust mulch," as it was later called, which conserved what moisture was in the ground. It was in effect dry-farming as practiced afterward where the rainfall of two seasons is used to produce a single crop. Some fields produced half a crop, and where the ears did not fill, at least the stalks made "shock-fodder." Wild hay was short, but in the prairie swales the deep rooted "slough grass" yielded well. Every farmer's stackyard was filled with long ricks "as high as a man could pitch a forkful." Lean hogs were butchered as early as frosty weather insured the keeping of the meat. More pickled pork was barreled that late autumn than in any year before or after. Beef and mutton were well fatted on the open range as usual, though the "branches" all went dry in midsummer. Big Slough springs, a quicksandy outcrop overgrown with rushes and cattails, at the point on a low ridge just east of William Meredith's place "came in mighty handy that year" as a source of water for the livestock of the neighborhood. And the

deep wells proved the forethought of their excavators. Those that failed were deepened, usually to permanent advantage. Altogether the settlement got through the winter without serious hardship. Not one of the Plum Grove neighbors had to compromise his independence by accepting aught of the 8,000,000 pounds of food and clothing poured into the territory by the generosity of the Northern states for their former citizens. Their old friends "t'other side of the river" would have gladly helped out the Plum Grove folks, if it had been thought necessary, but "they shared with each other and got along without 'aid.'" It is remembered that one Plum Grove man who served yellow corn bread at his table was rather sternly remonstrated with by his visitor after the meal was over. "You know, Hank, your folks don't have to eat hog-feed. All in the world you had to do was to fetch your sack over to my crib and help yourself to what *white* corn you need. Yankees like yellow meal, but—not 'our kind of folks.'"

Of the 30,000 starved out settlers who left the territory that year, many a gaunt family in their ragged covered wagon, was glad to accept food as they passed through Plum Grove on their way back East "to *her* folks." Perhaps some of them changed their opinion of "Missourians" because of that experience, as did others who knew the Plum Grove neighbors, and their "kind of folks," in those years of sectional hatred. All over the eastern counties vacant farms to rent became a feature in the life of the people, "after the Great Drought."

The speculators at the land sales had gobbled up every open forty and every "claim" that had been staked and held fraudulently for a quick profit. Many worthy land seekers had been tempted to sell out at the preposterous prices offered by the speculators' agents who had no scruples in defrauding their Eastern principals. When the Panic of 1857 and the Great Drought had "knocked the bottom out of land prices," those greedy investments at the land sales had much to do with the bitterness Eastern capitalists felt toward Kansas. Perhaps it had a good deal to do with the intensity of hatred which marked the beginning of the War Between the States which was preluded by the Kansas conflict. It certainly had a devastating influence upon the hopes of many early settlers. The colony of friends from Clay county had large hopes of room to settle their children around them on Slough creek. After the land sales those hopes vanished. The flood of immigration before the Great Drought had filled up the country much faster than anybody could have fore-

seen when the Douglas bill let down the bars to the flowery prairies. Only the treeless higher land along the divide now lay unoccupied. Around Plum Grove the broken timbered tracts west and southwest of Oskaloosa had attracted the young men soon to come of age and one or more of them had actually staked out claims and cut house-logs anticipating the promised early opening of the Delaware diminished reserve. That expectation also was disappointed by the change in land office policy in consequence of the disturbed situation in the territory. Word came from Washington that the reserve opening was postponed indefinitely.

That led to the first wedding at Plum Grove and the giving up of the plan to begin married life in a cabin on the reserve. James Henry Meredith, eldest son of William and Nancy, and Mary Faubion, younger daughter of John, were married in the year of the Great Drought, by the Rev. H. H. Hedgpeth, circuit preacher of the M. E. Church South. "Jim and Mary" they had been called from their cradles, they had been playmates, school mates through their childhood and sweethearts through their teens. "Jim and Mary" they were through the ten years of their married life and in the memory of their friends thereafter. A good place to rent, just outside the Plum Grove school district, two or three miles south of historic Hickory Point "battlefield," was offered them by a young friend who had lost his wife and baby. He was leaving the territory disheartened and couldn't sell his land, his two-roomed log and lumber cabin with a twenty-acre field of corn. There the present writer first saw the light of the Kansas prairies, on the first of August, 1862, the day before his mother's twenty-sixth birthday.

That was the beginning of a common practice of Plum Grove young folks' marrying and "setting up housekeeping on a rented place" in the hope of accumulating capital, in livestock usually, to own a farm of their own. It was not such an undertaking as it would have seemed at a later time; livestock multiplied rapidly, farming equipment and housegear "for a start in life" were always largely wedding gifts from parents and friends. Every young man had his own team of horses, hogs, cattle and sheep. Every bride had her kitchenware, bedding, some furniture, fowls, perhaps a milch cow and even a saddle pony. "If they had no bad luck for a year or so, they'd get along first rate." Hard work and the need of good management, with the interest and good wishes of all their friends, every young married couple had a right to expect, and who could wish for more as a beginning? It was up to them to justify

the community's hope. "So long as they kept their health and babies didn't come too fast they had a good chance of being as well off as their old folks by the time they got their first gray hairs."

But renting a place is very different from making a home out of one's own acres. One third of the crop for the landlord, the uncertainty of tenure, the natural lack of interest in improvement, which would only make the place more desirable to others, the thousand and one petty accidents and discouragements incident to every undertaking, bred a restless impatience with present conditions, a disposition to makeshift methods and instability in general. A crop failure, a siege of sickness, a loss of livestock through disease or otherwise, lack of harmony in the home, sometimes ended in permanent discouragement and mere futility. There were such cases in the Plum Grove community as in every other. Men and women grow old, wear out and die, in spite of all they and their friends can do. Sons and daughters fail of their parents' fondest hopes and may become a sorrow or a burden. Life is uncertain and fate is fickle, as men and women are forced to believe. Yet few communities could be found in the length and breadth of the land so generally fortunate and humanly happy as Plum Grove in the first two decades of the neighbors' experience in Kansas. They did not lie in the path of the main tragedies of the "conflict." Main traveled routes of immigration, of trade—and of the marauding bands—passed Plum Grove by on either side at some miles distance. That they escaped the fate of other communities was probably due to their reputation for probity and peaceful disposition, their self restraint and independent industry. They did not know of the fighting at Hickory Point till they heard the Free-Staters' cannon on Sunday forenoon when they were at public worship. All the turmoil and violence about Lawrence and Lecompton and down along the border counties came to them by report. They saw the newspapers, of course, but the lurid accounts of outrage were discounted as political propaganda, distorted for a purpose. They spent little time about the noisy towns, notorious for their saloon brawls, had a contempt for quarrelsome discussion to no purpose. But there was one circumstance which, they afterward believed, had much to do with their immunity from molestation.

Three or four of the older men had gone to mill at Grasshopper Falls on the day when the historic Free-Stater convention was in session, August 26, 1857. It is not known that they chose that day for their business with any thought of the convention, though they must

have known of the appointed meeting. As the occurrence was often referred to in after years, they could have had no idea of its probable significance when they set out with their grist from home. At any rate they afterward congratulated themselves that they represented the respectability of their community as a whole, as to character and opinion.

While they sat at ease enjoying their noonday snack under the maples on the river bank, awaiting the grinding of their corn and wheat, Dr. Charles Robinson and a friend, Joel K. Goodin, probably, strolled by, were given the time o'day and paused to exchange a courteous word. The conversation lengthened into a casual discussion of the convention and Robinson's strategy to secure favorable action on Governor Walker's urgent call for all voters to take part in the October election of the next legislature. Asked for their views on the matter, the Plum Grove men spoke briefly and to the point. Any other action seemed to them bad citizenship. The legislature was the instrument of the people to enact laws as the majority desired. The last legislature had made a botch of the job, but the Free Staters had started a revolution. It was time such foolishness should be laid aside and every law-respecting man should join with his neighbors to clean up the mess that was ruining the territory. There was no reasonable doubt that the majority of actual settlers and homemakers were in favor of free labor, so why not put an end to the fighting? As for themselves, the Plum Grove folks and all of their kind were sick and tired of the squabble between the "Le-compton gang" and Free-Stater cabal and would vote accordingly for decent law-abiding candidates pledged to put an end to the outrageous situation.

That was plain-speaking, Doctor Robinson and his friend conceded, and whether the Plum Grove men were right or wrong in their opinion of the "Topeka government," the two were glad to make the acquaintance of such outspoken friends of the general good. Robinson thanked them for their hospitable invitation to share their fried chicken and other good home-cooked food, as contrasted with what had been served them in the hotel dining room a few minutes before. He said he hoped to know them better when they had occasion to visit Lawrence their "natural trading point." If at any time he could be of any service to them, he'd take it as a favor if they'd call upon him, and he'd be glad to visit their community whenever his duty led him their way.

Perhaps their plain talk had something to do with the energetic

and successful fight he made that afternoon in the convention, when he told the objectors that "a man that is too *conscientious* and too *honorable* to change his tactics with a change of circumstances is too conscientious for politics." At any rate that was the beginning of a tolerant acquaintance between the Plum Grove men and the Free-Stater statesman whom they came to honor for his great services to all good Kansans. They believed that whatever control he was able to hold over his turbulent associates tended to save the Plum Grove community from the depredations suffered by other settlements thereafter. He had their sympathy when as their first governor of the new state he carried the burden of administration in spite of faction and "personal feud forced upon him by those whose insane ambition was balked by his laudable resistance."

The election of Lincoln and the secession of the deep South brought Kansas into the union under the Wyandotte constitution, framed by a representative convention in which none of the prominent leaders of the conflict figured much. The constitution and the admission pleased the Plum Grove folks as a triumph for the principles of the Douglas bill. Lincoln they admired as a man, though none of them would have voted for him "as the candidate of a sectional party animated by a sectional hatred of the rest of the union." Him they understood as one of their own kind of folks, related to them in origin and possibly bloodkin. One of the Plum Grove pioneers so much resembled Lincoln in form and feature that he was sometimes called "Old Abe." Secession they detested, disunion they abhorred. They believed that if Douglas *could* have been elected "a constitutional way might have been worked out to settle the negro question for good and all somehow." For anybody could see that outside of the deep South "the majority of thinking people disliked slavery as a menace to common folks." That was why there had been for years a steady migration of people like themselves across the Ohio. They knew that Missouri was probably three fifths free labor in sentiment already, a steady stream of free-labor people coming in and many slave holders selling out and removing to Texas. And it was so in Kentucky, western Virginia and eastern Tennessee. "Of course New England might pull out of the union as she had threatened more than once." They hoped that Crittenden's compromise plan, and later Lincoln's tentative proposals to placate the border slave states might prevent disruption of the union. And the Plum Grove folks were no more misguided as to the tremendous forces at work than a million other citizens, North and South, at the time. Did not Horace

Greeley and many another advocate "letting the erring sisters go in peace," when the deep South framed their Confederate States of America?

When Fort Sumter was fired upon and "blood sprinkled in the faces of the Virginians," Tennesseans and North Carolinians, the hearts of the Plum Grove men and women were heavy. The union must be preserved, there was no two ways about that. If old Andy Jackson were in the White House he'd be halfway with his troops to Charleston again. Things would never have come to this pass if he'd been President instead of poor old fumbling Jimmy Buchanan. The Free-Stater guerrilla leaders were tumbling over each other to get into the new volunteer army called out by Lincoln, and word came from t'other side of the river that the Proslavery guerrillas were joining up with thousands of young adventure-seekers to fight for the confederacy. Not a Southern family in Kansas but had relatives on both sides from the first skirmish. The Plum Grove folks were glad when Governor Robinson organized the Kansas militia as a home guard to protect the state from invasion and every man among them of military age enrolled at once in the two local companies. They had no taste for military discipline, war had no glamor for them, but for generations their people had been used to home guard service against the Indians and the British; near relatives had ridden with Doniphan to the conquest of New Mexico and Chihuahua; their great uncles and cousins had been with Jackson at New Orleans and Pensacola. They certainly had no lust for shedding the blood of their confederate kin. But with a clear conscience they could serve the nation and the state in repelling invasion. That naturally wouldn't be understood by their newcomer neighbors from the states so far North that all Southerners were like foreigners to them.

The Civil War years brought material prosperity to Plum Grove. Good crops most seasons, higher price for their produce, a ready market for their livestock brought them more money than most of them had ever handled before. William Meredith sold \$1,200 worth of hogs on foot at one time in 1864. Army contractors and the quartermaster's department at Fort Leavenworth took their fatted hogs and cattle, their mules, and young horses fit for the cavalry and mounted officers. There was some jayhawking carried on by pseudo-patriots hanging about the county seat under the pretext of keeping down "rebel sympathizers" till the decent citizens, goaded by the *Oskaloosa Independent* in fiery editorials by fearless John W. Rob-

erts, drove the miscreants out of the country. Nobody at Plum Grove lost much from the night raiders, though a shopkeeper was pointed out, by those who knew, years after, who paid by installments for a horse he had stolen from a neighbor "during the war." When word came to "our folks at Plum Grove that the jayhawkers were on the rampage again, the horses would be padlocked inside a stout board fence about the dooryard at night and a loaded shotgun stood handy by the window." One night a minor tragedy was narrowly averted when a bald-faced colt, mistaken for a jayhawker, made its identity known while yet its owner's finger hesitated on the trigger. At another time a daughter of the house slipped out through the back door and hid her father's fine, silver-mounted Kentucky squirrel rifle in the weeds when a "posse appeared claiming authority to collect private arms for public use." Citizens had their cornercribs, henhouses and smokehouses looted at night without respect to the owner's well known allegiance. Mounted parties sometimes galloped through the settlement before daylight toward town, setting all the dogs to barking. An inoffensive man in town on an errand alone might expect to be bullied and abused as a damn' Copperhead, Missourian, Secesh spy, or worse, by drunken gangs of loafers in front of a saloon, threatened with a rope or a throat-cutting. That was before a lynching party of townsmen chased two or three of the worst toughs into the ravines west of Oskaloosa and shot them down one moonlit light, and in a measure redeemed the county seat's good name among the law-abiding citizens roundabout.

Death had come to Plum Grove as to other communities of early settlers. Ellena Carter, first wife of Robert M.; Deborah Faubion, first wife of Spencer; the wife of another, name now unknown; Narcissa Justis, aged 24, a niece of Nancy Meredith, on a visit with her infant boys from old Clay county, several children and one or two of the Walnut creek friends had been buried before the Great Drought of 1860. John Faubion, first of the pioneer men to go, died in 1863. He was the present writer's maternal grandfather, a man of quiet piety, noted for his tireless industry and tremendous physical strength. It was said of him that he carried six bushels of wheat in a tow bedtick, laid upon him by three companions, up a flight of stairs at the mill. He had survived the bite of a rattlesnake, without the usual remedy of liquor, which he had foresworn, using only a "poultice of blue ash sprouts." The same year, Thomas V. Carter's wife Susan was laid to rest. All her family, save one son, died of

tuberculosis, "quick consumption," as it was called in those days. Spencer Faubion, surviving a second wife by three years, closed his adventurous career in 1867. He had been one of the young Clay county neighbors who had followed the California gold-rush, knew Dr. Charles Robinson in the Sacramento squatters riots, and came back safely with two or three thousand dollars from the Mother Lode. On his return overland, as he had gone, he and a few companions were overtaken by winter somewhere on the upper Platte, or perhaps on the Republican. They had been lost for some days and were nearly starved. At dusk they made camp under a low bluff on the bank of the frozen river. He was cutting up a dead cottonwood for fire wood when a herd of buffalo poured over the bank onto the ice. A great bull slipped and fell. Before the beast could get upon his feet, Spencer brained him with his axe. He used to tell how they feasted on hump-steak that night and roasted the big leg-bones for the marrow to satisfy their fat-starved bodies.

His resemblance to "Frémont the Pathfinder" was often remarked, "though he was a much larger man than Benton's son-in-law."

John Horner died in 1866, the youngest man but one of the original party of 1854-1855. Not much is remembered of him except that "he was a good neighbor always." He was of Scotch-Irish stock, perhaps of the same migration that settled the Piedmont region of the Southern colonies and supported Jefferson in his long struggle with the tidewater squires for a more liberal share in government.

Elizabeth Howard of Walnut creek, about whom no other record than her tombstone inscription seems to be at hand, was laid to rest among her Plum Grove friends in 1869. The sunny acre in the edge of a young black oak grove, a quarter mile west of the schoolhouse, donated by John Jeffries and set aside for burials at the time of the first death, was beginning to fill up. It was free for all who wished to lay their dead with those whom they had known "in old Clay county, t'other side of the river." And children hearing a favorite hymn over a new made grave used to think

"On the other side of Jordan,
In the sweet fields of Eden,
There is rest for the weary,"

somehow referred to the broad Missouri which divided their Kansas home from the land from which their people had come. And perhaps as the mists of homesickness gathered in the mind of the dying, the same dim thought may have consoled the weary one at the end.

There was much of the mystical in the worship of the pioneers,

their thought of the Hereafter was colored with a vision of rest, and return to a home beyond the river of Charles Wesley's poetry of inspiration, after the long years of toil in a new land. Vocal music was always a large part of the life of the Plum Grove people. The great hymns which unquestionably were the major element in their religious expression, the old ballads their ancestors had brought with them from Britain, all the popular songs of their American experience, lived in their daily emotional concerns. Their preachers were often as much noted for their leadership in song as for their pulpit eloquence, or for their doctrinal exposition. Their teachers in the neighborhood school were remembered as much for the extent of their new music introduced as for their instruction in the three R's. A certain Major Morton, forgotten for all else, used every winter to "conduct courses in note-reading and part-singing" about the country districts and his singing schools were a much prized element in the social life of the younger people. Many a happy marriage dates from those gatherings which brought the lads and lassies together.

In June, 1870, the idyll of "Jim and Mary" came to its close in her burial in the old Plum Grove graveyard. They had only that preceding spring realized the lifelong dream of a home of their very own. A pleasant little place half bottom land and half limestone bluffs and prairie, on Big Slough creek halfway between Oskaloosa and Osawkee and eight miles or so from Plum Grove, had been bought with their savings "of ten years living on rented places." They had stripped themselves of their livestock capital "down to a bare new start to make the part payment." There was a nearly new hewn-log house neatly chinked with lime mortar, in which the tiny shells of creek sand mollusks showed to the great interest of the children. Log-heaped fires and burning stumps had lighted the new field at night for weeks during corn and garden planting. The great rocks in the face of the bluff were half concealed by wild shrubs and young hickory saplings. There was a fine spring in the limestone ravine a few steps from the kitchen door. The creek was full of fish and a set line at night seldom failed to provide fish for breakfast. The trail up the spring branch to the schoolhouse at the edge of the prairie wound in and out among wild flowers and the pools were alive with minnows, periwinkle shells and crawfish. Every week or oftener some of the young folks from Plum Grove rode down the creek to spend "overnight with Jim and Mary at their new place." It would be a sheltered home in winter time, their

friends agreed, below the sweep of the Arctic wind which scourged the prairies. The livestock took to their new range as if they too had found a more congenial home.

Grandmother Nancy had come to stay a week, and then in the middle of a sultry and moonless night came the never-to-be-forgotten rousing from sleep, the hurrying barefoot stumbling over the rocks of the spring branch to call good neighbor Morg Donahue to ride for the doctor. The coming and going of anxious friends and relatives, the long and weary procession of neighbors and the great gathering from miles around and the rounding of raw yellow clay over a new grave, the enforced abandonment of the desolated home, remains a nightmare in the memory of those most affected. Perhaps it was no more poignant than the breaking up of many homes in Kansas in the early days, perhaps of little interest to the present reader except as it helps the present day student of history "to know just how things were then"—which is the primary purpose of all history.

The new decade opened to the people of Plum Grove with a promise of fulfillment greater than they had hitherto known. Most of them now had commodious frame houses of native timbers and Northern pine, painted white, though some still clung to their well-built hewn log structures, in some cases weatherboarded over. William Meredith had used oak studding, joist and rafter, with *black walnut* weatherboards, casings and shingles. A beautiful fireplace and chimney of squared limestone graced the well designed simplicity of a somewhat attic style. Good barns, granaries and stables of log and rough sawn lumber sheltering seed and bread grain, work horses and milch kine were common. Well grown shade trees and orchards gave the homes the look of established residence.

The local church society having outgrown the schoolhouse meeting place, in consequence of a successful revivalist's efforts, it was decided to build a community church. Pledged contributions were spontaneous and liberal, not only from the neighbors but from well-wishers at a distance. A skilled architect-carpenter was employed by the day and boarded round. William Meredith donated the acre in the corner of his homestead opposite the schoolhouse ground which James Rickman had given the district years before. Labor and hauling of the lumber from Leavenworth were the free contribution of those who could best spare the time from their farmwork. The church was completed during the summer and dedicated in the

autumn. The cost was more than \$2,000, "paid up and out of debt on the day of the dedication ceremonies."

That may be regarded as the high point in the community's history. Times were changing swiftly, more swiftly than anybody then could have appreciated. The war years were over and gone. Old partisan hatreds were dying out in Kansas except as self-seeking politicians exploited the old-soldier vote by flaunting the "bloody shirt." Visiting back and forth between the Plum Grove families and their Missouri relatives had been resumed soon after Lee's surrender. There was much bantering among reunited Rebs and Yanks, but there was no diminution of respect or affection one for the other. It is recalled that one evening at dusk a lanky stranger rode up to the woodpile at "Jim and Mary's house," inquiring of the axe wielder if "Jim Meredy lived hyarabouts?" "That's what I'm called by friends," was the answer. "Ah don't give a damn about *him*, but Ah'd like mighty well to see Cousin Mary."

He was invited "to 'light and look at his saddle," supper being about ready. Mary welcomed her distant relative whom she hadn't seen since she was a little girl. The two men sat late that night reviewing the years between and Mary shuddered to learn that they "had been poppin' bullets at each other across a corn-patch at the battle on the Big Blue the night Gin'l Joe Shelby fell back undeheh ohdehs of the Commandin' Officeh, afteh captu'in' some of the Plum Grove militiamen—an' sehved'm right, foh fightin' ag'in theh kin-folks."

Sometimes Jim protested that the ex-Rebs allowed a union man mighty little room in the argument when the folks from t'other side of the river were visiting at Plum Grove, but there was never any bitterness in the discussion.

The first wedding in the new church was when Ann Rickman, daughter of James and Eliza, was married to a handsome young Virginian, Samuel S. Stout, lately lieutenant and acting captain under Stonewall Jackson. Nobody ever thought the less of him for having spent his latter teens following the great confederate strategist, and to the boys of the neighborhood he was a glamorous figure. Not so glamorous were some of the ex-soldiers on either side who drifted through the settlement in the great post-war immigration when the railroads were selling off their notorious land subsidies in the middle and western counties of Kansas.

There was a plague of bonding schemes to promote railroad building for a decade and more; fraudulent elections, corruption of offi-

cials, sturdy resistance to lawsuit, mandate and injunction, that had much to do with local politics for years. The state and county governments were honeycombed with graft, extravagant public improvements, wasteful financiering, piling up of debt, burdensome taxation, whereby the real progress of the new commonwealth was long retarded. That became painfully evident when the dreadful grasshopper visitation fell upon Kansas in 1874, like unto the plagues that smote Egypt in Moses' day. "In the state of the treasury, it was decided, relief by the legislature was *impractical*; that the counties would have to assume the burden and an appeal must be made to *citizens* of Kansas and the *people* of the *Eastern states*."

The story of the coming of the locusts has been told a thousand times, in newspapers, sensational fiction, verse and verbal tradition, but no one who did not witness that greatest of all disasters that made the name of Kansas a byword in the older states, could have had any adequate conception of the catastrophe.

There had been rumors and newspaper stories for weeks, as there had been tales of local devastations ever since the white man's first sortie into the buffalo country, but most people east of the counties of the plains discounted the reports as "sensational newspaper stuff as usual, cooked up in the printshops to fill space." Then when word came from Jewell county that the pests were crossing over from Nebraska like a blizzard, darkening the very light of the sun, people began to wonder if they might not get as far east as Topeka. They were headed southeast; like a freakish summer storm, they mightn't strike the country north of the Kansas after all. But on the incredible sky-filling myriads came like the very wrath of God, benumbing the imagination.

We were at the table; the usual midday meal was being served; one of the youngsters who had gone to the well to fill the water pitcher came hurrying in, round-eyed with excitement. "They're here! The sky is full of 'em. The whole yard is crawling with the nasty things." Food halfway to the mouth fell back upon the plate. Without speaking the whole family passed outside. Sharp spats in the face, insects alighted on the shoulders, in the hair, scratchy rustlings on the roofs, disgusted brushing of men's beards, the frightened whimper of a child, "Are they going to eat us up?" Turkeys gobbling the living manna as fast as their snaky heads could dart from side to side; overhead, the sun, dimmed like the beginning of an eclipse, glinted on silvery wings as far as eyes could pierce; leaves of shade trees, blades of grass and weedstems

bending with the weight of clinging inch-long horrors; a faint, sickening stench of their excrement; the afternoon breeze clogged with the drift of the descending creatures.

Not much was said, children huddling against their mother, whose hand touched lightly the father's arm. Men and larger boys got out the corn-knives, whetted them hurriedly across the grindstone and set out for the cornfields. Before sunset they came back weary and dispirited, the corn-stalks, they said, were already naked as beanpoles. It was a good thing that a big cutting of prairie hay had been stacked early—it'd be needed when snow came. The garden truck had disappeared, even the dry onions were gone, leaving smooth molds in the ground empty as uncorked bottles. Fruit hung on the leafless branches, the upper surface gnawed to the core. The woods looked thin as in late autumn. Someone called attention to the pitted earth here and there and we discovered 'hoppers with their ovipositors sunk to the wings, filling the pits with eggs.

Water troughs and loosely covered wells were foul with drowned 'hoppers. Neighbors passing spoke of strange happenings. A young wife awaiting her first baby, in the absence of her husband, "over t'wards Hickory Point" had gone insane from fright, "all alone in that sun-baked shanty on the bald prairie." Eggs and milk tasted of the 'hoppers and cows were drying up somebody said, who'd been over at Osawkee to the mill. A train had stalled on a curve coming out of Leavenworth on the narrow-gauge because the crushed grass-hoppers greased the track so that the wheels couldn't take hold till the train crew shoveled sand on the rails. Some thought the grass-hoppers were thinning out somewhat, moving east on the wind—millions of them perishing in the river, but plenty of them made the crossing and were already as far east as Carrolton and Sedalia in Missouri. Some of the farmers here and there began plowing their denuded corn lands for wheat, turning up the 'hopper eggs to the sun and harrowing the ground thoroughly in hope of destroying the pests as they hatched. Others said that was wasted effort and the wheat'd better be saved for bread. "If winter didn't kill them off, it was all up with the people, there'd never be another harvest in Kansas."

Again the covered wagons began to appear on the main traveled roads, heading east. It was said that the railroads were hauling western settlers free out of the western counties to save them from starving on their claims, homesteaders and those who had made a payment or two on railroad lands. Again the cry for "aid" for

"starving Kansas" was heard all over the country "Back East." Poor bedeviled Kansas, would that Godforsaken land ever be able to feed its people?—and every one of the older states had still uncultivated soil enough to feed a million more inhabitants than it had! It was all very well to glorify the pioneer, but what chiefly ailed the American people was their everlasting restlessness. Never satisfied with the advantages they had, but always hungering for the West, pulling up stakes and moving on, restless as the grasshoppers themselves.

A state relief committee, organized "when the legislature shirked its job," was evangelizing the East for "aid" and once more it was "begging Kansas," to the disgust of the more provident farmers like the Plum Grove folks who felt it was high time that the state should stand on its own feet, considering the taxes they had been paying and the scandals that had disgraced its financial affairs. Money could be raised for everything else and bonds could be voted by the legislature for every wildcat scheme suggested heretofore, but not a cent out of the state treasury for the state's "'hopper victims." Of course every decent person would share anything he had with his needy neighbors in such a crisis, but this everlasting panhandling the East was beneath the dignity of a solvent commonwealth. The good people of the older states would give and give, as they'd been doing ever since the territory had been made a battleground to propagate the Republican party, but Kansas ought to have some pride by this time. What would the bonding of the state for another million dollars, to feed its needy, amount to as against its good name, at home and abroad, when one or two good crops would square the bill under decent management? Pass the hat and let all give what they could; then let the people's government shoulder the burden for whatever was necessary to carry the destitute over till the next harvest.

So spoke the men of Plum Grove. Not a pennyworth of the "aid" so generously poured into the state would any of their folks accept. None of them went hungry, none of them lacked clothing or fuel to keep them warm the winter after the grasshoppers came. There was bread grain and there was meat, thin, to be sure, but as always there had been something left over from the previous year in every household, lard and molasses and dried fruit, and there was this year's potato crop, too deep in the ground for the 'hoppers, there was milk for the children, even if they had to buy wheat bran from the North to make a hot mash for the cow after the shock-corn nubbins were

gone and hay gave out before grass in the spring. Hogs and cattle were sold at a cent a pound, delivered at the railroad for Iowa and Eastern feeders. Again they reduced their livestock to a bare new start. They cut and hauled cordwood to trade in at the stores in town, at four dollars a cord, to buy winter boots and shoes. What cattle they couldn't sell some of them gathered up in herds to be driven across the river and wintered on shares among their folks in Missouri,—which by the way, was reciprocated the next year when Missouri pastures failed and livestock was brought back to be fattened on the speculators' open lands along the divide.

Fortunately the winter of 1874-1875 was relatively mild, though not so mild as the following one when the ground did not freeze till late in February after the blue birds appeared, weeks ahead of their usual arrival. Planting was unusually early in the spring of 1875; though the eggs of the 'hoppers hatched so fast that by the time the plowman made the round, his previous furrow was squirming with the young creepers. Harrowing destroyed most of them, but uncultivated fencerows, and all outside the planted ground supplied armies of devouring and insatiable creepers that moved over the face of the earth consuming every green thing. Gardens, weeds, newly sprouting field crops, the very lint on fence rails and the accumulated dead leaves in the woods down to the bare ground. We fought the creeping armies with dusty furrows, pits and fire. They could be herded with buckbush brooms wherever we chose, even into the flaming mouth of the furnace under the soap kettles. Nothing could stay their advance until their wings sprouted and they rose into the air to ride the spring winds and disappear as they had come, a mysterious visitation never to return. Scientists told us afterward that their breeding grounds in the northwestern plains had later been destroyed by the trampling herds of cattlemen from Texas and the advance of the wheat growers.

Seasonable showers, replanting and vigorous cultivation after the 'hoppers were gone, produced a good crop of corn and late gardens. Corn planted on June 18 stood six feet tall on July 23, the newspapers recorded, and the blessed prairie grass kept on growing after it had been gnawed to the ancient mat of roots all over the speculators' lands. That year baling presses were set up at Winchester and Nortonville furnishing a ready market for wild hay for shipment to the East. And we used to say God never made better roughage, for horses especially, than the clean, sweet, dustless prairie hay that grew free as air and water for whomsoever would take the

trouble to harvest it. Certain it is that without it, the early Kansans could hardly have survived.

The grasshopper years exacted a fearful toll from the lives of the Plum Grove people and "their kind of folks" over the country, far more serious and far-reaching than any of them could have known at the time. And few of their descendants today can appreciate what those exhausting years did to the pioneers' spirit and to the mental attitude of their children, and children's children. The original settlers of Plum Grove had arrived in the new territory of the flowery prairies full of hope, determination and in the prime of their bodily vigor. The oldest of them, William Meredith and John Faubion were in their forty-seventh year. All the other fathers and mothers were from ten to twenty years younger. All of their Missouri-born children were under eighteen. James Rickman and John Horner, the youngest of the men, were each barely twenty-seven. The youngest of the wives were not yet twenty-five. Those who had survived were well past middle age when the grasshoppers came and growing weary in body and retrospective in mind. No longer were they looking forward to the modest fortune and prosperous comfort they had in expectation when they crossed the river which separated them from all they had known. The younger generation married in Kansas, or at least beginning their wedded lives in the new state, were rearing families of children too large for their circumstances, most of them on rented farms, as yet unable to acquire permanent homes of their own. Kansas had not turned out to be the land of small-farmers such as their people had been for generations. Even some of their fathers were heard to regret that they were too old to begin life anew in the broader land of opportunity in the far West. Everybody was settling down to a more or less hopeless endurance of present depressing conditions for men with little capital, or restlessly contemplating another good crop and removal to where a man could make a new start, *somewhere, somehow*.

Clearly for them the old days were gone, a new age was upon them. The grasshopper years had settled that definitely. Taxes had gone delinquent, debts had accumulated, "everything a man could make went to the storekeepers and to the money lenders." Chattel mortgages had come to be a curse to the whole state and even the legislature was worried about the financial condition of the common citizen. The whole effort and energy of the farmer, on whom everything depended, seemed to be drained off to support

the town dwellers, most of whom "apparently had nothing better to do than to loaf in the shade, or about the saloons, telling dirty stories or cooking up some slick scheme to gouge the country folks." A morbid condition of mind was settling upon the once independent tillers of the soil. "Raise less corn and more hell," was a common slogan. And the soil was no longer the reservoir of age-long accumulated plant-food it had been when the black ribbons of over-turned sod stretched unbroken from one end of the field to the other. Every rainstorm now washed a thick broth of fertility down the gentle slopes, baring patches and gullies of yellow hardpan, rubbery putty when wet and stony hard when dry. Barnyard manure and futile attempts at seeding to clover and timothy, had failed to prevent the impoverishment of their rolling fields. Hog cholera one year had swept away the chief source of money to clothe their families and pay off the most pressing debts. Mortgaged farms for the first time became a menace to the Plum Grove neighbors.

James Rickman was thought extremely lucky when he was able to sell a part of his homestead to clear the rest of debt a few months before he died in 1880. He had been one of the solid citizens of the community, kindly and humorous, but stern minded against irreverent frivolity and all manner of loose-speaking and intemperance, as became his Scotch-Irish ancestry. There was a tradition that his first immigrant ancestor crossing to the New World had been shipwrecked and saved his life by a stupendous effort, swimming and keeping afloat many hours till he was picked up. It is not known which of the older states he came from to Missouri in his childhood, probably Indiana, however, since he had relatives there. He had been a plainsman in his younger manhood, probably connected with the freighting business on the Santa Fé trail or in government service to the far frontier army posts. One story of his adventurous experience out there on the southwestern desert he used to recall as a warning to us youngsters against uncontrolled temper. He and his wagon mate were at breakfast after days of wearisome and dangerous travel, when some trivial disagreement arose between them. Hot words led to a blow and young Rickman lunged at his partner with the butcher knife in his hand. The stroke fell short, but ripped belt and shirt to the skin. The horror of coming so close to killing his friend, he never got over, shuddering at the thought of it as long as he lived. It modified his naturally violent temper thereafter, but it was hard for him to forgive an affront or

injury. His silent withdrawal from intercourse with one who had offended him, was mistaken by his neighbors for a stubborn resentment, "holding a grudge," but nobody who knew him ever accused him of wronging a neighbor or failing in offices of kindly services in time of need. He loved the woods, kept bees and knew the stolen home of every wild swarm in the country round about. The cutting of a beetree was an adventure that appealed to his nature and was a delight he shared with the boys of the neighborhood. The picture comes back to memory of his felling a wide-branched hollow elm near the creek on a hot afternoon in early autumn, his white shirt sweated tight to his thick chest, his eyes eager with the prospect of a "good haul of wild honey, like John the Baptist lived on in the desert, boys," and his gratification when we filled a washtub with comb, some white and new and some brown as tobacco from previous seasons. It was he that gave the name of Honey creek to the chief branch of our creek, since applied on government maps to the whole north fork. His courage and resolution was often proved. Riding into Winchester one afternoon, he found a young son of a Crooked creek friend beset by bullying "hellions about Ned's own age egged on by their fathers and a pack of loafers!" Uncle Jim Rickman with a broken fence-rail took his station as umpire, saw the fight through to Ned's hard won victory, washed the bloody victor at the horsetrough, bought him a new shirt and rode home with the young man. Staid church-member, as he was, he often chuckled when the affair was referred to in his presence. "I warned 'm to stand back and let the two settle it, or I'd crack the feller that interfered—and I meant it." He and his much beloved wife, Aunt Eliza, had many children, who were all married, dead or widely scattered, years before her death in 1910, in Oskaloosa. She won a prize at an old settlers' meeting a year or so before, for the longest residence on her original homestead of anyone in that part of the county.

James Henry Meredith, died in August, 1885, in the Kansas valley, opposite old Lecompton, of a recurrent disorder contracted during his military service. We brought him back to old Plum Grove for burial beside his Mary, and half a mile of farm wagons and lighter vehicles filled with old friends followed his coffin to its final resting place.

He was a "man without an enemy, naturally quick-tempered, but 'just and placable always,' too much so for his own good, for people took advantage of his generosity." Slender, dark haired, blue eyed

and sandy bearded, wiry and agile, he was not so robust as some of his brothers, for "he had worked too hard before he was fully grown, the first years in Kansas."

He was a notable hunter always. The year before his death his oldtime hunting companion wanted to know if "Jimmy still went deer-hunting the morning after the first 'little skift of snow?'"—recalling to mind how one evening at dusk he rode up to the door with a fat buck behind his saddle and a wild turkey at each knee. That was the winter of 1868-1869, when we had venison, turkey, wild goose or some other game, from the first snow till the February thaw. Very often he used to lower a frozen carcass from the roof-tree and shave off steaks for breakfast. Buckskin "whangs," wild-goose or turkey wings for dusters always hung curing by the kitchen stove or beside the chimney jamb those days, and Jim could cut as neat a quill pen as any old time schoolmaster. The spring he moved to the Shelt Britton place he tried hard to get Shelt to sell him a planting of Peachblow potatoes, new in that neighborhood, but Shelt refused—he wanted the crop for his own use. Then a few days after, Jim plowed up a gopher hill and found a peck or so of fine seed potatoes, so he had a good patch of Peachblows after all, much to Shelt's disgust. That year, too, he raised the finest musk melons anybody in the country roundabout had ever seen. He took one to a campmeeting Sunday dinner at Plum Grove, "a monster, fourteen or fifteen inches long, ten inches t'other way, delicious beyond description, and all the old neighbors and relatives begged a few seeds of it." "What Jim couldn't raise in the way of new kinds of truck there was no use in anybody else trying." He was always much interested in the improvement of farm crop varieties and livestock, a good practical veterinary whose services interfered often with his own interests.

Much broken in spirit by Mary's death, he took over the burden of his father's homestead for ten years, devoting his all to the rearing of his five young children whom he lived to see grown men and women, dying before his time, worn out and very poor. Of independent mind, his opinion and judgment was much trusted, his religious ideas were more modern than usual among his kin, a source of some anxiety to his sectarian friends, though nowadays his beliefs would be mildly Unitarian. His education, beyond elementary schooling, was the result of his own wide reading and candid thinking. His love and knowledge of Shakespeare and American history often disconcerted people of greater cultural pretensions. "Ask Jim

about that, he'll tell you," was a common expression when political topics were under discussion. "Now, if you'll just read that as you hear us folks talk, maybe it won't puzzle you," was the advice he gave an experienced school teacher who was debating a passage in Hamlet or Macbeth. For our people used as common speech the language they had brought to Virginia while yet Shakespeare was a living memory. And the generations had done little to change it save in confusing past tense and participle, and suchlike homely locutions.

"Jim and Mary" represented the connecting link between the first rough-log cabin days of the migration across the river and the beginning of the dispersion of the Plum Grove folks after the state had entered its fourth decade of corporate existence. Their parents represented the departure from the Atlantic seaboard and the trek to the edge of settlement by "our kind of folks" in the Missouri valley of 1833. "Jim and Mary" represent the settlement of Kansas, as the present writer and his wife represent the final longest migration to the Pacific tidewaters, completing the traverse of the continent since 1640 or perhaps a few years earlier. It is typical strand in the warp and woof of American history.

Individuals had scattered out from Plum Grove, but William Meredith was the first to lose his homestead by the forces which led to the final dispersion, for today not one of the descendants of the Plum Grove pioneers retains an acre of the original homesteads of the 1854-1855 settlement. He was the eldest of the settlers, perhaps the most prosperous during the first two decades. Approaching age, failing strength, the accumulation of debt, due to the care of a large family over a succession of calamitous seasons, and a security debt for a friend ruined him. But most of all it was due to a natural change in economic conditions in the country's development to which he could not adjust himself. He relinquished his homestead and ended his days on a rented farm, in the spring of 1888. His wife Nancy survived him but a year or two. He was of robust frame, five feet nine or ten, "never inclined to portliness," square-built, dark-haired, one eye "Virginia blue," the other brown, weighing about one hundred ninety-five pounds, a noticeable man in any assembly. Of positive though unassuming demeanor, somewhat intolerant of compromise in matters of strict probity, he held the respect and liking of all who knew him during a long and active life in the affairs of his community. He had the character of a patriarch

of his tribe. Detesting servility as much as he condemned any pretense of aristocracy, he was democratic to the core.

Reproached by an old friend for refusing to take advantage of a legal technicality by which he might have saved some part of his estate, he was fierce in his rejection of the kindly meant advice. "I'm too old to play the baby act. Let the law take its course. I'll not crawl out of a bargain—and that's the word with the bark on it." His friend said no more, but years afterward, recounting the matter he still held "half a loaf is better than no bread, and your granddad might have abated his pride and harmed nobody." His descendant thinks differently.

In the spectacular Oklahoma opening rush several Plum Grove families and individuals found their opportunity for a new start in a new country. Others began to find employment in the great railroad shops at Topeka and in like industrial establishments in Kansas City, in new centers west and south. Lately word has come of some as far east as Ford's automobile works around Detroit. Now the grandchildren and great grandchildren are frequently heard from in every state from the Canadian border to Mexico. Which is also characteristic of the pioneer breed which opens the way to later and tamer and more acquisitive kinds of folks, better adapted to the competitive atmosphere of crowded centers. It may well be that a recrudescence of the pioneer spirit will ultimately lead us to the richer life in closer contact with the good earth from which we have all sprung and from which all of us must in the final analysis of our economic and social development draw our essential sustenance.

James Henry Clay Hopewell was buried in 1911, his wife, Mary Jane, in 1918. Napoleon Bonaparte, his brother, had passed on in 1896, having survived his wife Jane Catherine nine years.

Robert Morgan Carter, died in 1905, thirty years after the death of his second wife Amanda.

The death dates of John and Elizabeth Jeffries, of Jacob and Eskias Faubion and their wives are not available at present, though inquiry has been made and doubtless will be recovered in the not distant future. They were all good neighbors, law-abiding, kindly, unpretentious, industrious, and their descendants may well be proud of them as worthy citizens of the nation.

Of the Missouri-born children who came with their parents to Plum Grove, some three or four died before they reached their teens. Alexander Meredith, next younger than "Jim," and their brother

Charles Wesley, married sisters, Davidella and Mary Elizabeth Long, daughters of John S. and Agatha Long, of the old neighborhood in Clay county, Missouri, Scotch and Irish by descent and Kentuckian born, that is the parents, the daughters and several sons having been born in Missouri.

Mary Jane Meredith, older daughter of William and Nancy, married David May, of Rural township, also Missouri born, a nephew of Caleb May who helped frame the Wyandotte constitution. David was a union veteran, a great friend and admirer of his brother-in-law "Jim."

Julia Ann, younger sister of "Jim," married the Rev. John Wesley Faubion, who took over by purchase from the heirs the homestead of John Faubion, his grand-uncle. "Preacher Johnny," or "Brother Johnny," as he was known among us, was of a line of ministers for several generations. He and his younger brother Nathaniel, and a cousin William Edward Broadhurst, were long known in Kansas as able circuit-riding pastors. John Wesley was agent for his conference in the founding and promoting of Enoch Marvin College at Oskaloosa. He and his wife died in Arkansas City about 1900.

Benjamin Franklin Meredith, born 1849, the youngest of the family, married Nancy Elizabeth, second daughter of John and Elizabeth Jeffries, and it was in their home that William and Nancy died near Dunavant.

Margaret Elgivia, the eldest child of John and Elizabeth Jeffries, married Spencer Houston, first born of Esekias and Serena Faubion.

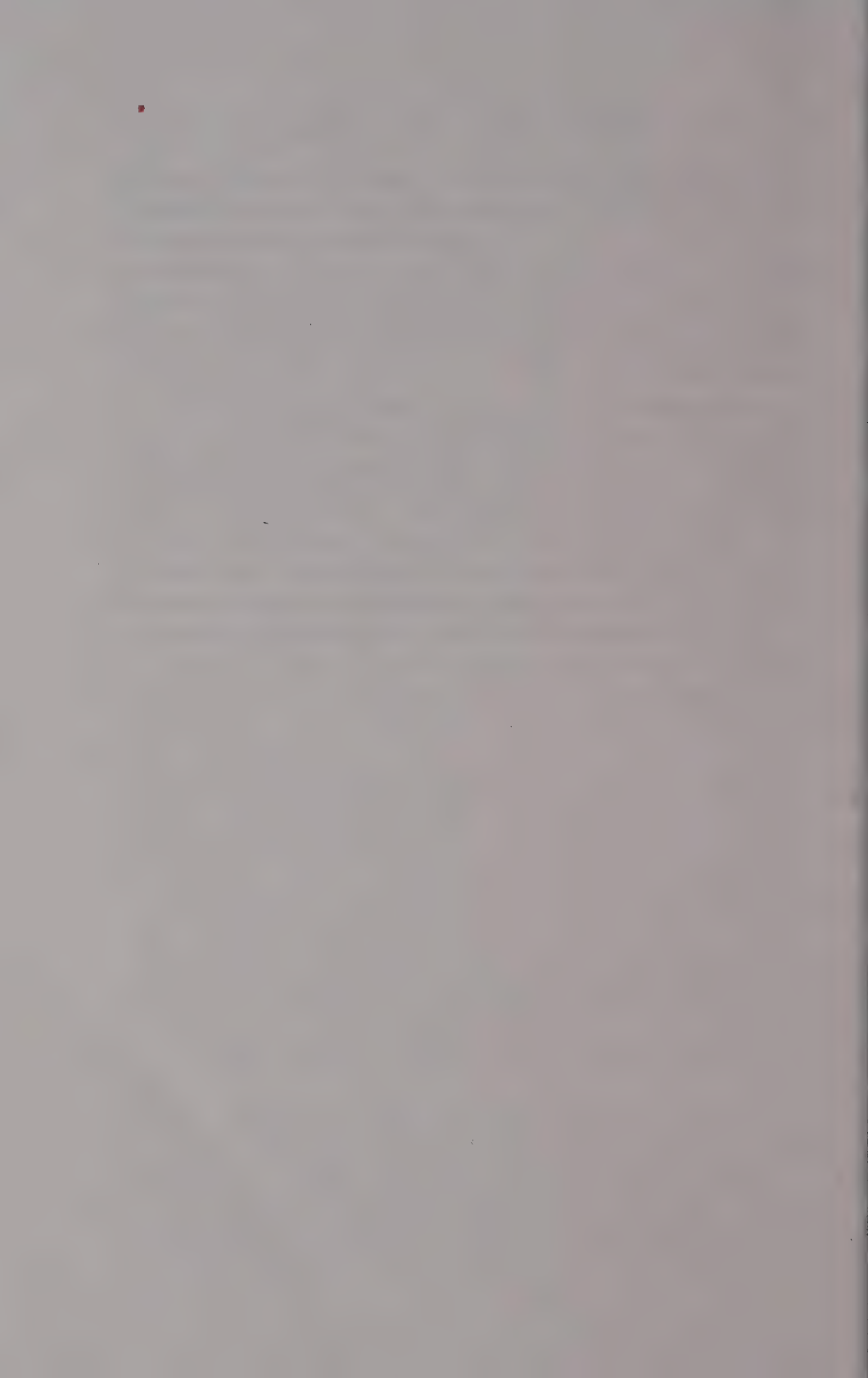
Of N. B. Hopewell's sons and daughters, Thomas J. married Sara Lyons; Henry married Margaret Lacey, the second daughter of T. W. Lacey. Mary Jane married George Garrett; the third son, Oskar, married a neighbor girl whose name is not at hand; the younger daughter, Nancy, married George Corn.

Spencer Bird, son of Charlotte Faubion, Nancy Faubion Meredith's sister, died 1923; his wife Amanda Moseby, 1919. They are buried at Plum Grove. Their daughter Katie married Francis Marion Carter, son of Robert M. and of Amanda, Robert's second wife.

All of that Missouri-born generation are now dead, so far as records show, as are most of their younger, Kansas-born brothers and sisters. The grandchildren of the Plum Grove pioneers, of whom the present writer is the eldest survivor, are mostly aged men and women, and the other descendants, as has been said, are scattered from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from Canada to Mexico, mostly

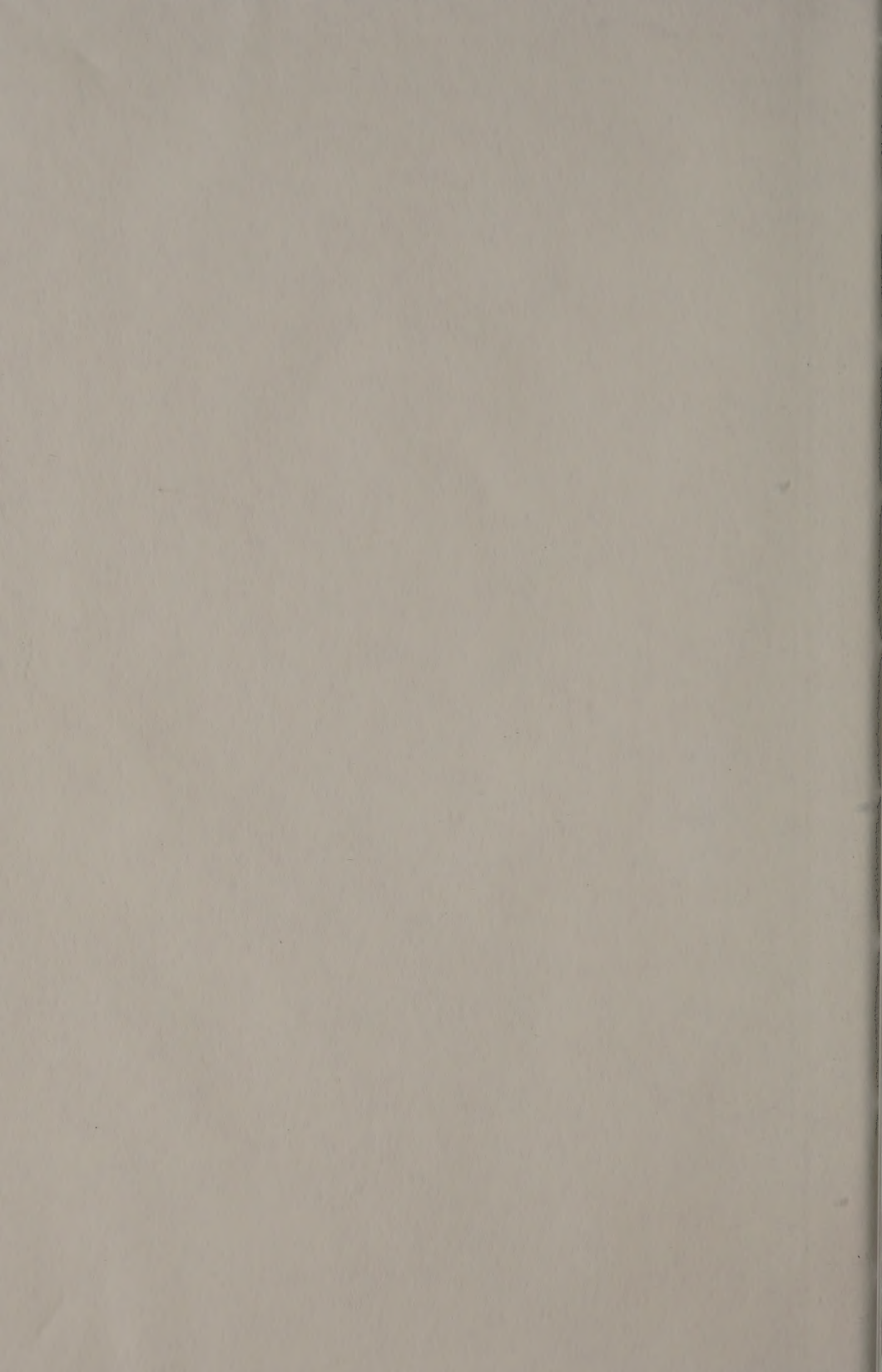
in the West. The farmer-tradition among them, which ruled the lives of the Plum Grove pioneers, making them somewhat intolerant of sedentary occupation, is less urgent nowadays. Professional and mechanical employment seems to be most prevalent. Probably most of them at times envy the sturdy, independent, laborious and decidedly respectable lives of their ancestors who founded and developed the small colony of "Our Kind of Folks" at the "head of Slough creek" in 1854-1855.

As a distant relative writes from Texas, "none of them has ever been in jail, except, maybe for fighting," and fighting was so rare among the men at Plum Grove that the one remembered unimportant affair of "bloody noses" was a sort of thing from which other more notable incidents used humorously to be dated. At the present writing only three lawsuits in nearly a hundred years are recalled among the connection, two friendly suits to quiet title and one election contested in court. Aesop's fable of "the two cats, the monkey and the hunk of cheese" has always been a favorite precept among us.









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